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URBAN MOBILITY – ARCHITECTURES, GEOGRAPHIES AND SOCIAL SPACE

Editors: Anne Elisabeth Toft and Magnus Rönn



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FOREWORD

Anne Elisabeth Toft and Magnus Rönn

NAF symposia are held once a year. They are important platforms for critical reflection on architecture and architectural research in the Nordic countries. In order to ensure their dynamic and democratic format, the events are conceptualized and organized in collaboration with various partners and each year hosted by a different university or school of architecture. Each year, the symposium focuses its discussions on a topic or theoretical framework representing the current research interests of NAF and its collaborating partner.

The 2015 NAF Symposium *Urban Mobility – Architectures, Geographies and Social Space* was hosted by Urban Studies, Faculty of Culture and Society at Malmö University. It took place on 5–6 November 2015.

The driving forces behind the successful event and its organization were Karin Grundstöm, Senior Lecturer in Built Environment / Architecture, Malmö University; Jesper Magnusson, Lecturer in Built Environment / Architecture, Malmö University; Katarina Nylund, Professor in Urban Planning, Malmö University; and Per-Markku Ristilampi, Professor in Ethnology, Malmö University.

The present anthology, which is the proceedings publication from the symposium, collects six articles written by authors who all presented papers at the event. The articles represent a selection made by the editors of the publication. All of the articles – except those by invited keynote speakers Dr. Anne Tietjen and Dr. David Pinder – have been submitted to a double-blind peer review process, following a peer review template developed by NAF.

The publication of the anthology was made possible thanks to the generous financial support of Svensk-danska kulturfonden.

We wish to thank all of the contributors for their efforts, patience, and commitment to the work of NAF, the 2015 NAF symposium, and the present proceedings publication. Our thanks are extended most particularly to Svensk-danska kulturfonden and to the many devoted peer reviewers who have supported NAF and its work by offering their time and professional expertise to reviewing articles.

Anne Elisabeth Toft
President of NAF

Magnus Rönn
Vice-President of NAF

INTRODUCTION

Anne Elisabeth Toft and Magnus Rönn

With the “mobility turn” of recent years – introducing new ways of theorizing mobility – and more than half of the world’s population living in cities, questions of urban mobility are crucial to the work and theories of architects, urban designers, and planners all over the world.¹ Urban mobility as a key concept is also at the forefront of the work of many sociologists, geographers, economists, politicians, and visual artists who, each in their own way and from their own perspectives, try to understand and define what constitutes today’s cities and the lives lived in these cities.

Globalization in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has created new urban patterns. The global knowledge-based economy, on the one hand, creates a new framework for urban development; on the other hand, the cities themselves are a framework for business development.² Economic activities are concentrated in metropolitan regions which grow far beyond their former peripheries, creating a new phenomenon: cities without limits. In these cities, the foundation for the traditional understanding of the city as a separate entity has disappeared. Today, traditional city centres only make up a small part of big cities. The main part of a big city consists of places that do not relate to the centre in a clear way, places with no clear boundaries between rural areas and urban areas and where urban functions are not integrated.³ These conditions, which challenge the cohesive force and self-perception of the city and its urban texture, make hitherto unknown and complex demands on infrastructures and mobility.

The aim of the 2015 NAF Symposium *Urban Mobility – Architectures, Geographies and Social Space* was to facilitate a cross-disciplinary discussion on urban mobility in which the juxtaposition of different discursive perceptions of the concept would foster greater insight into and understanding of both the challenges and potentials that it represents. It focused on some of the key themes currently facing cities and the urban: the transformation of the city and our built environment; migration; rural decline; the interaction between city, architecture, and inhabitants; the role of architects and architecture in

the creation of democratic and sustainable urban contexts; the city and its representation; the politics of intervention; and the actions of governing and developing.

In a self-reflexive manner, the symposium also aimed to address how knowledge on urban mobility is produced and institutionalized in the development and application of seemingly objective practices of scientific research. The symposium thus critically examined how different disciplines within mobility research and specific research contexts develop diverse research ideologies and regimes that retroactively contribute to changing the way society perceives mobility and the concept of mobility.

Mobility can be studied on different scales as well as from different perspectives in architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design. Cultural geographer Tim Cresswell, who has written extensively on mobility understood as socially produced motion, suggests a categorization that distinguishes between mobility as observable empirical reality, mobility as representational strategies ascribing meaning to mobility, and mobility as embodied activity and a way of being in the world.⁴ All three categories of mobility are represented within urban research, and Cresswell's categorization served as a point of departure for structuring the discussions at the symposium. These were framed by keynote lectures given by David Pinder and Anne Tietjen respectively, who in their lectures focused on very different aspects of urban mobility.

In his article "Instant Urbanism and the Politics of Mobile Architecture", David Pinder reflects on the power relations through which mobilities are produced. Arguing that mobility, flexibility, adaptability, and creativity are central to ideologies of neoliberal urbanism, he believes that calls for their extension can become complicit with processes of neoliberalization. In his article, he critically looks back to a number of historical references that, according to him, inspire contemporary architects and urbanists in their work. Especially avant-garde architectural experimentation from the 1960s and 1970s seems to heavily inform current discourse. This assumption not only leads to Pinder considering the present fascination with radical mobile architecture of the past, but also, and more importantly, to him discussing how these representations of mobility were imbued with critical and emancipatory intent. Against this background – and driven by the question "What is the significance of those past avant-garde urban and architectural visions

for recent calls for ‘temporary and mobile urban solutions?’” – Pinder, in his article, pursues and puts into perspective both threats and possibilities within fields of temporary or instant urbanism.

Anne Tietjen in her article brings attention to what she describes as “the backside of urban mobility”. Mobility, in her opinion, is an important explanatory factor for the urbanization and polarization processes currently taking place in Denmark. Since the 1990s these processes have led to shrinking rural areas and rural decline, leaving parts of Denmark depopulated and with no growth. This development is not only seen in Denmark; on the contrary, this development is characteristic of many countries around the world. Based on the example from Denmark, Tietjen, however, presents a picture which points to the necessity of rethinking and transforming the local potential and the existing built environment in rural areas. This work would require architects, but, according to Tietjen, it also requires new design methods and design education methods. In her article entitled “Working with the Backside of Urban Mobility: Strategic Design for Rural Decline” she reflects on how architects can work with strategic design in peripheral rural areas. Drawing on her research and teaching experience from the Department of Landscape Architecture and Planning at the University of Copenhagen and her students’ empirical work, she outlines and discusses an operational framework for strategic design based on actor-network theory.

Parking lots, pedestrian tunnels, train station platforms, and suburban path systems are all mobilities spaces and part of the infrastructural systems of the urban context. Focusing on mobilities design, Ditte Bendix Lanng, Simon Wind, and Ole B. Jensen provide a critical view on mobilities spaces in their article “Mobilities Design: On the Way through Unheeded Mobilities Spaces”. These kinds of spaces – often anonymous and standardized and by some theoreticians described as “non-places” – have long been neglected by architects and urban designers, they argue. However, such spaces might potentially have a lot to offer, if they were supported and qualified by design. Everyday mobilities research proposes that they are significant and can perform as more-than-effective transport infrastructures. Indeed, central to contemporary life and our notion of it and to our perception of the urban, they are public spaces which are part of social and cultural formations. In their article, the authors shed light on some of the many challenges facing mobilities design, but they also point out design approaches to and suggestions for what mobilities spaces, in their view, might ideally be and do.

In his article “Mobile Place-Making on an Everyday Urban Walking Route: Rhythm, Routine, and Experience”, Jani Tartia investigates the rhythmic qualities of everyday urban mobilities. Coming from French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre’s “rhythmanalysis”, Tartia focuses on spatial rhythms in the urban context from within a spatial practice – a walk. Movement, Tartia argues, is a meaningful activity that produces and shapes spaces when spaces, as in his article, “are understood as social processes, relational and always ‘becoming,’ rather than fixed physical sites”. In a rhythmanalytical sense, he adds, “walking is about producing spatial rhythms and simultaneously about observing, being influenced by, and experiencing rhythms”. In his article, he applies the method and theory of rhythmanalysis to a specific study of everyday walks and walking practices, which he carried out in two cities in Finland. Discussing how people walk in the cities and how they engage in walking and their own walking practices, Tartia’s study illuminates how different kinds of mobile place-making are produced in and through movement.

In recent decades, cultural planning has been at the forefront of urban development in many cities. More and more cities are trying to reinvent themselves as capitals of culture in an attempt to retain and attract the highly educated and affluent segment of society. Often this is done with a strategy based on the idea of the existence of a mobile, emancipated, and creative class that will move to culturally stimulating places. Today, the economies of a growing number of cities are based on tourism and the tourism industry, and arts, entertainment, and cultural landmarks are some of the things that tourists who visit cities specifically demand and for which they are willing to travel. Even Smith Wergeland, in his article entitled “Art on the Move in the City of Temporariness”, takes a closer look at the impact that global experience economy has had on urban development in Oslo and what the consequences have been specifically for the city’s art scene. According to Smith Wergeland, the Oslo art scene is both thriving and suffering from the extensive changes in the city’s demographic structure and dynamics. For better or worse, however, the closing of a large number of workspaces for artistic collectives in the inner city have left the artists in transit. From critical perspectives on the challenges of running temporary art venues and how the state of permanent transit affects the art scene in Oslo and its ability to stay productive, Smith Wergeland in his article reflects on different cultures of mobility and temporariness that have recently occurred in society and in the contemporary city.

Magnus Rönn in his article “Urban Design in the City of Helsingborg: The Conflicting Interests of Mobility and Cultural Heritage in a Contemporary Project” sheds light on power struggles and political agendas in a local political matter in Swedish planning. The article deals with mobility of cultural values in the city of Helsingborg, where leading politicians in 2013 allowed a group of developers to build a hotel and congress centre in the city’s old and cultural-heritage-protected area in the harbour. The delicate case, which included a relocation of the old and locally treasured Steam Ferry Station in Helsingborg to another part of the city, forms background for Rönn’s reflections on the contemporary city and its mobilities; on territorialization, de-territorialization, and the displacement of monuments and cultural-heritage sites.

In summary, the six articles in this anthology were written by authors who all presented papers at the 2015 NAF Symposium *Urban Mobility – Architectures, Geographies and Social Space*. As such, the articles reflect the discussions that took place during the event, covering a wide range of cross-disciplinary themes relevant to contemporary urban mobility studies. The articles deserve to be read in their own right, however. It is our hope that they will stimulate further thinking on urban mobilities and that the book will make a small yet qualified contribution to the already existing research on the subject.

NOTES

¹ According to the United Nations, in 2006 half the world’s population had become urban. Sources: Population Reference Bureau, “World Population Highlights”, *Population Bulletin*, 62, no. 3 (2007), p. 10. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights*, Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.202 (2007).

² Niels Albersen, Gertrud Jørgensen, and Lars Winther, “Introduktion”, *Den Grænseløse By* (Center for Strategisk Byforskning, Institut for Geovidenskab og Naturforvaltning, Københavns Universitet, 2013), p. 9.

³ Gertrud Jørgensen, “Planlægning for det gode liv i byen”, in *Den Grænseløse By* (Center for Strategisk Byforskning, Institut for Geovidenskab og Naturforvaltning, Københavns Universitet, 2013), p. 29.

⁴ Tim Cresswell as cited in “Call for Paper”: <http://arkitekturforskning.net/na/announcement/view/29>. Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), pp. 3–4.